

The Educational Expectations of Children of Immigrants in Italy

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and

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Abstract: In this paper we investigate both the educational short-run expectations and long-term aspirations of the children of immigrants living in Italy and attending eighth grade. We look at educational ambition, both as a predictor of educational choice and as a measure of social integration. We consider both secondary-school track and university goals. Data come from the ITAGEN survey (2005-2006). First, we analyze the association between expectations, aspirations and structural characteristics (e.g., migration status and country of origin) and social aspects (family socioeconomic status and friendship ties). The latter aspects seem to be determinants of both short-term expectations and aspirations, whereas aspirations are not associated with migration status. Second, we investigate the relevance of context in delineating educational attitudes. We performed a multilevel analysis including both individual and school-level variables. Our results show that attending a school where most of the Italian pupils have high educational expectations may lead children of immigrants to enhance their own aspirations.

Keywords: Educational expectations and aspirations, immigrant integration, ITAGEN, friendship ties, scholastic context

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Introduction

The growing presence of children with immigrant backgrounds in the Italian school system has spurred social scientists to investigate their integration experiences. Data from the Ministry of Education indicate that students with non-Italian citizenship have lower educational attainment and poorer academic achievement than their Italian counterparts, and they are less likely to pursue university education. Official statistics show that 43 percent of students with non-Italian citizenship attend vocational school, compared with 20.3 percent of the whole population (data from MIUR, Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research, scholastic year 2008-2009). Checchi (2003) claims that pursuit of vocational education comes at the expense of university education and represents an obstacle to social mobility. In light of disparities in post-secondary enrollment between immigrant and Italian youth, we seek to understand how the educational short-run expectations and long-run aspirations of children of immigrants are formed.

The article will be developed as follows. In section 2, we provide a brief description of the Italian school system. Section 3 reviews the literature about both educational expectations and aspirations and derives testable hypotheses, and Section 4 describes the data and empirical research strategy. To investigate educational outlooks of the children of immigrants living in Italy, we analyze a recent survey of youth enrolled in their last year of primary school (eighth grade). First, we examine whether children of immigrants have different expectations and aspirations compared to natives, and how these differentials are associated with generation status, country of origin and family background. Second, we consider whether and in what ways educational goals are influenced by peers and school social context, which we represent based on the educational aspirations of Italian students attending the same school as respondents.

Children of Immigrants in the Italian School System

The Italian educational system is depicted in Figure 1. Public education is free, and students are guaranteed access to higher levels provided that they complete lower levels. The four main components are:

- Preschool (duration: three years, not compulsory)
- First level: *scuola primaria* (primary school, duration five years) and *scuola secondaria di primo grado* (middle school, duration three years)
- Second level: high school or other secondary school (duration five years)¹
- University (duration three years for B.A.)

Figure 1 About Here

After preschool, the first level consists of two steps: *scuola primaria* (primary school) and *scuola secondaria di primo grado* (middle school), which culminates in a state exam. Students who pass this examination are entitled to move on to the second level, which consists of three different tracks: high schools and art schools (*licei*), polytechnic institutes (*istituti tecnici*), and vocational schools (*istituti professionali*). School attendance in Italy is compulsory until age 16. Because the first level is expected to end at about age 14, the choice of secondary school represents a turning point in a student's life. Although each of the three tracks in the second level can be followed by tertiary education, students who pursue the vocational or technical tracks must complete five years of secondary school, which requires two years beyond the three-year technical cycle. Although a vocational track does not preclude university attendance, most university students complete five years of high school. Technical institutes are geared to preparing students for the job market by providing work-related skills as well as guaranteeing good training for access to tertiary education. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of university students hail from *licei*.

Our focus on youth with migration backgrounds is motivated by their growing presence in the Italian school system, which is summarized in Table 1. Between 2001 and 2009, the foreign-born share of Italy's student population more than tripled, rising from 2.2 percent to 7 percent. Nationally, students with non-Italian citizenship comprised about 7 percent of total enrollment, though this share differed by educational level. Youth with immigration background comprised about 8 percent of primary and lower secondary-school students, but less than 5 percent of upper secondary-school students. Although preschool is not compulsory, non-Italian students represented less than 8 percent of the total. Official postsecondary data are highly aggregated, providing information only about the number of students with non-Italian citizenship attending Italian universities, and do not distinguish between students who migrated for educational purposes and students whose parents have settled in Italy. Data for 2006—the most recent available—indicate that non-native students comprised approximately 2 percent of university enrollment.

Table 1 About Here

The existing literature about Italian immigrants' children largely focuses on school attainment, but few studies consider educational attitudes (see Azzolini 2011). Most studies agree that children of immigrants in Italy exhibit a lower propensity to enroll in high school and also are disproportionately concentrated in vocational schools. Compared with their Italian counterparts, they face higher risks of dropping out of the educational system and average lower scholastic achievements (Checchi 2009; Canino 2010; Azzolini and Barone 2011; Barban and White 2011). Second-generation students do not differ from native Italians in their high school enrollment behavior, but recent immigrants exhibit a higher probability of enrolling in vocational schools compared with Italians. Native Italians remain enrolled for longer periods than youth with migration backgrounds, even if their academic performance is subpar (Barban and White 2011).

Relatively few studies about nativity differences in academic achievement analyze international surveys (PISA or TIMMS) because of the low number of migrants in the samples, which reflects the recent nature of the Italian migrant flows. However, preliminary results from a national test administered by the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System on students attending primary schools (INVALSI-SNV 2010) show that immigrants' achievement is inferior to that of native Italians in reading, science, and mathematics. Several local-level studies have already pointed out this gap (Borrione et al. 2006; Mantovani 2008; Amistadi et al. 2009; Checchi and Braga 2009).

Literature and Research Questions

Many studies stress the importance of distinguishing between the concepts of expectations and aspirations in education. Educational aspirations “capture general goals or ambitions for the future” (Feliciano 2006, 285) and correspond to “the level of education that respondents would ideally like to achieve” (Portes et al. 2010, 779). Expectations allegedly represent concrete plans for the future (Feliciano 2006) and correspond to “the educational and occupational levels that children realistically expect to achieve” (Portes et al. 2010, 779). According to Jacob and Wilder (2010:3-4), while “expectations refer to what individuals *think* will happen, aspirations refer to what they *hope* will happen” (Jacob and Wilder 2010, 3-4).

Educational expectations and aspirations not only are strong predictors of educational attainment (Sewell et al. 1969) but also reflect self-perceptions and influence attitudes toward school that, if unfulfilled, result in frustration (Krahn and Taylor 2005). Portes and associates (2010: 793) assert a “strong relationship between aspirations and achievement,” which they consider to be “one of the best established facts in social sciences.” As such, educational ambition is a necessary condition for high levels of educational attainment. The question, then, is how are educational ambitions developed? More concretely, what constellation of factors is associated with high expectations?

Most research about the educational goals of immigrants and ethnic groups focuses on variation by ethnic identity and age at immigration (Perron 1996; Dinovitzer et al. 2003; Krahn and Taylor 2005; Beck et al., this volume). Studying second-generation Mexicans in the United States, St. Hilaire (2002) finds that the length of residence in the host country is positively associated with ambitions. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) also reported that second-generation children had higher expectations than children born abroad to immigrants. Neidert and Farley (1985) claim that differences in educational goals between natives and second-generation immigrants attenuate monotonically over time and across generations.

Prior studies also show extensive ethnic variation in educational attitudes. Among Hispanic students in the United States, for example, Cubans have significantly higher university aspirations compared with those of Mexican and Puerto Rican origin (Bohon et al. 2006). Louie (2006) assessed differences in outlook toward the future between Dominican and Chinese university students in the United States. A key insight is that educational expectations depend on reference group. The Dominicans compare themselves to their peers in the Dominican Republic and in the United States, while the Chinese compare themselves with their highly successful U.S. compatriots. Although Dominicans average lower educational achievement than Chinese students, they are more optimistic about their educational future.

In recent years, a growing body of literature has documented gender differences in educational expectations. Girls, on average, have higher educational goals and attainments than boys (Fernández-Kelly and Konczal 2005; Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005; Portes et al. 2010). Parents' education also plays a role in setting the ambitions of immigrants' children (Kao and Tienda 1998; Feliciano 2006). Other factors that influence educational ambitions include parents' involvement in schools, family structure, student academic performance in

early grades, student self-perceptions, and attitudes toward school (Lowe et al. 1997; Perron 1996; Kao and Tienda 1998; Trusty 1998; Garg et al. 2002; Dinovitzer et al. 2003).

Given the recent nature of immigration to Italy, there are few studies on which to draw. But the international literature (especially that for the United States) shows clear gaps in educational ambitions by nativity and birthplace (Kao and Tienda 1998; Portes et al. 2010), as well as by generational status (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), length of residence in the host country (St. Hilaire 2002), and age at arrival (Beck et al., this volume). Building on stylized findings from studies based in other countries with longer immigration traditions, we examine nativity and birthplace variation in the educational expectations of immigrants' children in Italy. Specifically we hypothesize that *the educational expectations of children of immigrants attending the last grade of lower secondary school in Italy differ from those of natives.*

Because immigrants' children have become the focus of international literature on educational expectations, ethnic differences have been a focus of interest. Countries of origin reflect variation in cultural capital, command of Italian and usage of source-country language at home, and different approaches toward school vis-à-vis the host country. We hypothesize that in Italy, as shown for the United States (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Bohon et al. 2006; Louie 2006), *the educational expectations and aspirations of children of immigrants will differ according to their country of origin.*

Schools are supposed to promote social integration among children of different background, guaranteeing a diverse environment that reduces social distances among individuals (Heyneman 2003). Importantly, intergroup contacts, if based on close relationships, have the potential to reduce prejudice (Pettigrew 1998), which is key for achieving social acceptance and eventual integration. Therefore, we expect that valuing friendships and meeting friends are key indicators of social acceptance that should be positively associated with educational expectations. More specifically, we *examine how*

students' reported friendship ties are associated with both their short-term educational expectations and long-term aspirations.

Finally several authors have established that students' peers influence their educational ambitions (Duncan et al. 1968; Hout and Morgan 1975). To examine how school context shapes educational attitudes, we use classmates' nativity as indicators of "significant others' influences." Specifically, we hypothesize that attending a *school where most of the Italian students expect to attend high school is positively associated with the educational expectations and aspirations of children with immigrant parents.*

Previous studies, mainly in the United States, have found that peers, parents and teachers not only help to shape educational goals (Buchmann and Dalton 2002), but also mediate the effects of other relevant aspects such as socioeconomic background and ability (Haller and Butterworth 1960; Duncan et al. 1968; Sewell and Shah 1967; Sewell et al. 1969). On the one hand, there are school compositional effects related to the presence and the characteristics of schoolmates. They act regardless of the presence of individual social relationships among peers: "School compositional effects constitute the aggregate influence of school peers on a student's school experience, above and beyond the effects of the individual student's own particular peers" (Portes and Hao 2004, 11920). On the other hand, students benefit from interaction with their peers. Students with lower abilities tend to perform better when they share classes with peers who have higher levels of ability, thanks to social interaction between the two groups. The main idea is that "predictions of the overall effect of schooling systems seem to depend on the social interaction between high- and low-ability students and resulting peers effect" (Entorf and Lauk 2008).

This second aspect is strictly connected with the idea of the "endogenous effect" proposed by Manski (1993) to describe the influence of a behavior in some reference group on members of other groups. For instance, "educational attainment may vary with the average

level of achievement of the students in the same peer group” (Cebolla-Boado 2007, 343). Recent literature focuses attention on the concentration of immigrants in the schools. The number of immigrant students present in the schools is supposed to have an impact on educational performances of natives for two reasons: learning opportunities due to school characteristics and peers effects (Cebolla-Boado and Medina 2011).

Educational performances and expectations may be influenced by micro-interactions among peers. “Peers affect academic motivation, engagement and achievement through information exchange, modeling and reinforcement of peers norms and values” (Ryan 2000, in Fekjær and Birkelund 2007, 312). This idea is based on the assumption that immigrants’ children are less inclined toward high aspirations and have more negative attitudes and performances than natives. Interactions between natives and immigrants represent “disincentives to investments in education” (Cebolla-Boado 2007). The existence of a negative correlation between the concentration of immigrants and the school attainment of students is a well-documented empirical conclusion in the American and European sociology of education (Felouzis 2003; Portes and Hao 2004; Fekjær and Birkelund 2007; Szulkin and Jonsson 2007; Cebolla-Boado and Medina 2011). Rather than focusing on the effect of immigrants on natives, we analyze whether the presence of native students with high educational expectations is associated with immigrant students’ educational motivation.

Data and Methods

We use the Italian Second Generation Survey (ITAGEN2) for our analyses. ITAGEN2 is a nationally representative survey of students living in Italy and attending lower secondary school during the 2005-2006 school year. These data, which were inspired by the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey, have been used to investigate several aspects of social integration of children of immigrants and Italian students (Dalla-Zuanna et al. 2009; Mencarini et al. 2009; Barban and Dalla-Zuanna 2010; Barban and White 2011). ITAGEN2 is

the first nationwide extensive survey including both natives and children with at least one foreign-born parent. It focuses primarily on the determinants of social integration and contains comprehensive information about the school environment. Data were collected through a questionnaire filled out by the students under the supervision of a researcher and their teacher. The baseline questionnaire focuses primarily on the characteristics of the family, the migratory process, and the use of time by children, as well as opinions and plans for the future (Barban and White 2011).

Schools were randomly chosen among those serving a foreign-born student body of at least 10 percent in the north of Italy and 3 percent in the south. A total of 20,528 students responded (11,910 natives and 8,618 children of immigrants), but we focus on a subset of 5,483 cases (2,926 natives and 2,557 children of immigrants) enrolled in eighth grade (51 percent males, 49 percent females). This sample restriction is strictly related to our aims, which requires acknowledging that expectations evolve over time as young people accumulate concrete scholastic experiences (Kao and Tienda 1998). Younger children do not face the choice about whether and which secondary track to pursue, and their ability to envision university prospects is at best aspirational. However, eighth-graders face a concrete choice about secondary-school tracks, and these students are much more realistic about their secondary-school options, which in the Italian system are highly associated with the likelihood of accessing tertiary education (Cecchi and Flabbi 2006). Parents of immigrant children hail from 92 different countries.

We lack information on two variables relevant for understanding children's educational expectations. The first involves the language spoken at home, which prior studies have shown to be a correlate of children's educational performance. The second concerns parents' expectations for their children and their own knowledge of the educational system. Both these aspects may have a direct impact on children's expectations and aspirations and

may introduce omitted variable bias in our analyses. We introduce several controls to mitigate these potential biases.

Measures

Consistent with prior studies, we consider two indicators of educational ambitions or attitudes, namely students' self-reported expectations to attend high-schools (*licei*) and to pursue university training (e.g., Sewell and Shah 1967; Woelfel and Haller 1971; Checchi and Flabbi 2006 for Italy). Both are measured as indicator variables. Students were asked about their desire to attend upper secondary school (and more precisely which kind of secondary school, distinguishing between high school and technical or vocational school) and also whether they wished to attend a university. We use the former to designate short-term expectations and the latter to represent long-term aspirations.

Both expectation measures are binary indicators; therefore, we use logistic regression models to evaluate the association between nativity status and educational expectations. We estimate separate models for short- and long-term ambitions. The most recent report of the national institute in charge of evaluating the Italian educational system (Rapporto Sistema Nazionale di Valutazione 2009) indicates that part of the variance in ability scores nationally is due to school-level differences. In order to discern the impact of school social context on the ambitions of children of immigrants, we estimate multilevel models, which permit us to take into consideration heterogeneity within as well as between schools. Specifically we address whether schools with a high percentage of Italian students who prefer to attend high school are associated with the short- and long-term ambitions of children of immigrants.

Dependent variables

Our measures of short-term expectations and long-term aspirations are derived from the following questions: "Which secondary school do you think you will attend?" and "Do you think you will go to university?" High educational expectations are measured as

secondary-school expectations for short-term plans (relative to vocational, technical or no upper secondary plans) and university plans for long-term ambitions or aspirations (relative to no university plans). We differentiate between *licei* and all other options because, although technical schools do not preclude university access, official data show that students who attend technical schools are highly unlikely to pursue tertiary.

Independent variables

Our hypotheses are organized around three constructs: migration status, including differences between immigrant youth and children of immigrants (second generation); country of origin; and school context, which we represent based on the nativity composition of the school. Below we describe each construct in operational terms. Because our focus is not citizenship but rather the integration challenges faced by youth with migration backgrounds, we characterize generation status based on birthplace and age at migration.

Migration status is defined based on parents' and students birthplace. Italian-born students with two Italian parents are classified as natives and serve as the reference group in the statistical analyses. Children of immigrants include youths living in Italy with at least one foreign-born parent. We distinguish among four groups of youth with immigrant backgrounds: second generation (those born in Italy and having at least one foreign-born parent); preschool-age immigrants (those who moved to Italy before they were five years old); child immigrants (those who arrived between the ages of five and nine); and adolescent immigrants (those who arrived at age 10 or older) (Glick and White 2003). Second-generation children are usually not Italian citizens unless they have a parent with Italian citizenship. Italian law allows children of immigrants born in Italy to obtain Italian citizenship when they reach age 18.

In addition, we designate the national origins of youth with migration backgrounds using information about their parents' country of origin. If parents were both foreign-born and countries of origin did not coincide, we used mother's origin. Our sample sizes permit us to distinguish several countries in the non-native sample, including: Albania (13.0%), China (8.9%), Morocco (7.5%), Romania (9.0%), India (5.2%), Macedonia (4.5%), Philippines (4.1%), and Tunisia (2.8%). Other origins were aggregated into regional categories: Eastern Europe and the Balkans (10%); South America (11.6%); the United States, Japan, and other European countries (8.1%); Other Africa (8.8%), and Other Asia (6.3%).

Friendships are operationalized using items that represent social interaction with schoolmates, namely the frequency of contacts among Italian and immigrant friends. We also consider students' perception of the value of friendship ties.

School context is operationalized using the composition of the student body. Specifically, we compute the average educational expectations of the Italian students attending each school. For sampling reasons and owing to the residential and school

segregation of immigrant students, 28 schools had fewer than 10 Italian students in eighth grade; we exclude these cases from the analysis. Importantly, these schools do not appear to be different in compositional characteristics from the schools that remain in the sample. Using this measure, we identified a threshold that is associated with an increase in children of immigrants' ambitions both in the short and long terms. This binary variable, calculated at school level, is used in the multilevel models.

Our analyses include several control variables that other studies show are associated with both the outcome and predictor variables of interest. These include family background, which we portray with measures of parental education and socioeconomic status and other demographic and geographic attributes. Parents' education is measured using the highest education level obtained by either parent. Because this information is based on student reports, nearly one-quarter of responses are missing. Parents' education is measured using the highest age when parents attended school and recoded in four categories: high (studied beyond age 20), medium (studied until ages 15 to 19), low (left school before age 15), and unknown.

A standardized measure of socioeconomic status (ISEI scale) has been used to determine the socioeconomic condition of each student. If both parents worked, we used the ISEI scale for the highest status occupation of either parent. Unlike education, this item has less missing data (only 8 percent). Unfortunately, the survey lacks information about whether parents are self-employed or salaried. Other measures included in the analysis represent students' demographic characteristics: gender, number of siblings, children of mixed couples (i.e., only one parent born in Italy) and area of residence. Geographical area of residence has been coded by dividing Italy into three areas. Northern regions are Lombardy and Veneto; central regions include Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Marches, and Lazio; and southern regions are Campania, Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily. We used this distinction because previous

empirical studies demonstrate differences in the educational performance of children living in the three areas of Italy. We also included the number of siblings because it represents a measure of the resources available in each family that can be allocated to education.

Results

Table 2 presents average differences in *licei* and university expectations by birthplace and age at migration. Native Italians are more likely than their foreign-born classmates to report that they expect to attend high school and college, but there is some variation by age at arrival. Second-generation immigrants have similar ambitions to native Italians, especially for college aspirations. Adolescent immigrants (age at migration 10 to 13) have the lowest short-term expectations, as only 23 percent of those who arrived after age nine reported that they expected to attend high school, compared with 48 percent of the natives. It is noteworthy that among immigrants, college aspirations are always higher than high school expectations. Although polytechnic or vocational schools do not prevent access to a university education, we know that most students who select these tracks are much more at risk of never attending college.

Table 2 About Here

Table 3 reports results from two logistic regressions that evaluate whether generational status is associated with educational ambitions, both short-term expectations and long-term aspirations, after controlling for background characteristics. Nativity differences in educational ambitions persist even after controlling for family background and other demographic characteristics. Foreign-born youth have significantly lower high school expectations compared with native Italians. With the exception of youth who migrate during middle childhood (ages five to nine), we do not observe significant differences in long-term aspirations compared to natives. This may be due to the fact that for eighth graders university options are in the distant future and difficult to envision, unlike the concrete choice of high

school track they will pursue the following year. In fact, high school expectations decrease monotonically with age at migration. That the educational expectations of second-generation Italian immigrants do not differ substantially from those of native Italians confirms for Italy the conclusions of U.S.-based studies (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; St. Hilaire 2002).

Gender is significantly associated with short- and long-term educational goals. Females have higher educational goals than males, a difference that is particularly evident in short-term expectations, as shown in other studies (Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005). Regional differences in educational expectations also are evident, particularly between youth living in the north of Italy versus the south. Family resources also define the educational expectations of children. And, in alignment with prior studies, family background is associated with attitudes: Having highly educated parents is associated with high academic expectations and aspirations. Results indicate that short-term expectations are much lower for children whose parents are low-skilled than for those whose parents are skilled. Having two or more siblings is associated with lower educational aspirations when compared to being an only child.

Table 3 About Here

Country of origin variation in educational goals

Italian immigrants are very diverse culturally, which is indicated by their many countries of origin. As the descriptive tabulations reported in Table 4 reveal, the highest educational ambitions correspond to youth whose parents hail from developed countries (Western Europe, the United States, and Japan), among whom more than half report plans to enroll in *licei*, and almost four in five indicate they expect to attain university training. Children whose parents come from Morocco have the lowest short-term educational expectations, as only 14 percent report that they intend to pursue high school (rather than technical or vocational training); but surprisingly, nearly one in four claims to want to attend college. Children with an ethnic background from Macedonia, China, and India also report

little desire to attend high school. On the other hand, immigrant children from developed countries (European countries, the United States, and Japan) have higher educational expectations and aspirations than natives.

Table 4 About Here

Because the skill mix of immigrants from various regions differs, it is conceivable that the migration-status variation in educational ambitions largely reflects variations in the source countries rather than differences in children's exposure to Italian schools. In fact, after introducing country of origin into the model, the effect of the migration status on educational expectations and aspirations disappears. However, the country-specific variation noted in Table 4 persists inasmuch as the point odds ratios indicate that students whose parents hail from India and China are only .47 and .42 times as likely as native Italians to report that they expect to enroll in high school, and they are only half as likely to indicate that they expect to attend a university. As in the descriptive results, Moroccan-origin youth are significantly less likely than Italian youth of similar family backgrounds to report that they expect to enroll in high school, but their lower ambitions do not carry over to tertiary plans. Only youth whose parents hail from South America surpass the long-term educational aspirations of native Italians from similar family backgrounds.

Table 5 About Here

To better appreciate ethnic variation in educational goals, we estimate two models: one that is based on the estimates presented in Table 5 and another that does not include any of the family background or demographic controls. Figures 2 and 3 compare the marginal effect of country of origin with and without standardizing the groups for systematic differences in social and demographic characteristics. Our results indicate large differences in both short- and long-term educational ambitions according to parents' country of origin.

These differences signal potential cultural divisions between native Italians and children of immigrants unless their educational attainments can be equalized.

Figures 2 and 3 About Here

Friendships and educational goals

Several studies focus on the effect of peers on educational outcomes without specifying what aspect of friendship influences ambitions and achievements. Our research question is: To what extent does friendship influence the educational goals of immigrants' children? Friendship ties can be relevant in defining educational expectations because friendships embody social capital, which in a school context can facilitate scholastic achievement and the setting of educational goals.

The basic idea of our analysis is first to show the relevance of the perceived peer ties on expectations and subsequently to examine the influence of peers (schoolmates) on educational ambitions. Therefore, our first step is to understand whether declaring strong friendship ties or good relationships with Italian natives or immigrants' children enhances the educational ambitions of children of immigrants. Friendship ties, measured through self-assessment, are related to the concept of network social capital, a resource attributed to people because they are members of social groups and networks (Mouw 2006). The testable implication is that students' social networks and their interactions with friends, acquaintances, or groups may shape their individual ambitions.

Table 6 summarizes the results from logistic models which, controlling for the same variables used in the previous model (sex, migration status, socioeconomic status, education level of parents, zone of residence, and number of siblings), introduce aspects of network social capital as predictors of educational ambitions.² We develop our analyses on the subsample of youth with immigrant parents. Excluding native Italians reduces the number of observations to 2,557. The results show that scholastic friendship ties are associated with high

ambitions: Students with immigrant backgrounds who think that schoolmates are really important tend to declare high short- and long-term educational goals. Although immigrants' children who have Italian friends declare more ambitious plans (especially long-term aspirations) than second-generation youth, meeting more immigrant friends is associated with lower short-term educational expectations. In other words, self-segregation by nativity may further undermine educational ambitions.

Table 6 About Here

These analyses do not establish a causal relationship between friendship ties and educational expectations for many reasons. For one, we lack comprehensive information about the complete friendship network; furthermore, the reduced form models do not consider “homophily” in friend selection. This term refers to the tendency for individuals to spend time and share experiences with individuals who are similar, which is reflected in their inclination to choose friends with similar characteristics. Therefore, the observed effects of social capital may simply reflect “selection effects based on the myriad of nonrandom ways in which people become friends” (Mouw 2006).

Unfortunately, with the ITAGEN2 survey, we cannot disentangle causal influences of friendship networks from homophily in friend selection. In other words, we cannot say whether high-ambition children influence each other, or if friends sort into networks based on other unobserved factors, such as individual abilities, that determine educational ambitions. Another important aspect is the possibility that the more-motivated students attend specific schools. In our case, this risk is reduced because we select children attending compulsory public schools. The large majority of primary schools in Italy are public, and attendance is regulated by geographical proximity. With few exceptions, children attend primary schools that are closest to where they live.

School context and educational goals

To understand the influence of school context on the educational goals of children of immigrants, we identified pupils as nested in schools. For this analysis we created a variable that measures for each school the percentage of Italian students who desire to go to *licei*. The main idea is that “predictions of the overall effect of schooling systems seem to depend on the social interaction between high- and low-ability students and resulting peer effects” (Entorf and Lauk 2008). For instance, as mentioned in the literature review, educational attainment may differ on the basis of the mean level of achievement of the students composing the reference peer group (Cebolla-Boado 2007). We try to test this idea with respect to educational ambitions by examining the association between individuals’ and schoolmates’ ambitions.

It is difficult to establish a causal relationship between individual students’ ambitions and the school-climate measure of educational goals; however, we can investigate whether there is an association between educational ambitions and school context. The specific research question addressed is: To what extent are the ambitions of immigrants’ children influenced by the educational expectations of their Italian schoolmates? The sample was composed of 2,275 children of immigrants divided into 166 schools.

We performed multilevel logistic regression, where the dependent variables were recoded into two categories representing those who do or do not expect to attend high school and those who do or do not expect to attend university. We controlled for variables mentioned in the previous models. Table 7 reports three sets of estimates: the null models, the models with only individual level variables, and those with the school-composition variable.

Table 7 About Here

Starting from the null models, we calculated the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) to estimate the proportion of variance explained by the school context. The ICC is 0.08 for the analysis of short-term expectations and 0.06 for the estimates of long-term aspirations.

The ICC represents the proportion of variability of educational expectations explained by different schools. The results are significantly different from zero, indicating that the school level influences expectations at the individual level. The null models indicate the extent to which variation in educational expectation is captured by variation in educational ambitions across schools. Our results indicate that school context matters. Between 6 and 8 percent of the variation in educational expectations of children of immigrants may be attributed to differences in the average ambitions of Italian students in the schools they attend.

The effect of the other control variables is similar to that in prior analyses, but our core measure warrants further discussion because it addresses whether the educational ambitions or goals of native Italians are important in shaping the ambitions of immigrants' children. Our results show that attending a lower secondary school where more than 33 percent of the Italians have high educational ambitions enhances the likelihood that children of immigrants will also have high educational ambitions. Having more than 66 percent of native schoolmates with high expectations is associated with even higher odds that youth with immigrant backgrounds will expect to attend *licei* the following year. Results for long-term aspirations also reveal a positive association with educational aspirations of immigrant youth, but only when they attend a school where more than two-thirds of native Italian students have college aspirations.

Summary and Discussion

Our results reveal several insights about the level of integration of the children of immigrants living in Italy. First, migration status and country of origin are associated with different short-term educational expectations. We do not observe significant differences in the university aspirations between the children of immigrants and the children of natives (except for childhood immigrants). Specifically, our results partially confirm hypotheses about the association between nativity and educational ambitions. Immigrant youth average lower

educational ambitions compared with Italian natives and children of immigrants who are born in Italy. Our results also corroborate recent literature in showing that children of immigrants have lower educational ambitions than natives. Moreover, our results are consistent with the official data on educational attainment of immigrants' children living in Italy. In fact, enrollment data for school year 2006-2007 reveals that only 2.5% of students attending *licei* have non-Italian, compared with 10.6% in vocational schools. This official data corroborate the strong link between expectations and educational choice.

Our analysis also shows that migration status has an impact, especially on short-term expectations. Long-term aspirations seem not to be influenced by age at immigration. These results may indicate some differences between educational ambitions in the long term and real expectations driven by actual scholastic results, influences from the family, and teachers. It is conceivable, on the one hand, that students provide more realistic accounts of their expectations as the date approaches for them to make secondary-school choices. On the other hand, because university options are further in the future, students may be more inclined to express less realistic aspirations.

One possible explanation is that immigrant parents and their children perceive polytechnic schools and vocational schools as more secure options than *licei* because they focus more on technical skills and applied sciences. This may represent a better investment for entering the labor market. However, a university education may be perceived as an important and indispensable goal to perform some professions. A more technical education may also be more transferable in case the family wants to migrate to another country, for example, their country of origin. A final possible explanation is the role of teachers. As discussed in Barban and White (2011), teachers may discriminate against immigrants by counseling families to enroll their children in short-term educational tracks instead of more long-term educational paths that facilitate access to a college or university and as a

consequence children also reduce their aspirations. Moreover, this selection in the secondary-school track may lead to segregation in the vocational schools.

Second, birthplace seems to have no significant effect on educational expectations and aspirations. Controlling for socioeconomic characteristics, second-generation children are similar to natives in terms of educational ambitions. This result suggests that second-generation children are going to be more and more integrated and that these pupils allow themselves to have the same ambitions as their Italian peers. Unfortunately, there are no official data about real educational choice confirming this result, which is, nevertheless, established in other national contexts by recent literature on the theme (St. Hilaire 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Third, our results indicate a certain degree of heterogeneity among ethnic groups in terms of educational ambition, both in expectations and in aspirations. In particular, pupils with Chinese, Moroccan, Macedonian, or Indian backgrounds show lower academic ambitions than all the others, while children whose parents come from developed countries have higher ambitions than natives. Previous studies show that Chinese, Macedonian, and Morocco children attending Italian schools obtain better results than children belonging to the other ethnic groups (Barban and White 2011). One possible explanation would be that families from these ethnic groups are more selective when they invest in education for their children. In other words, the family decides to invest only in children who are expected to obtain high scholastic results. This can be linked to theories that highlight migration as a way to improve family status through investment in those children who are particularly strong in terms of personal abilities. However, our results indicate that country of origin is a determinant in defining educational ambitions, even when we control for other covariates. Ethnic ties, and consequently ethnic social capital, seem to have a great influence in determining children's expectations. Differences in long-term aspirations, however, are

poorly associated with country of origin. It is interesting to note that this heterogeneity in country of origin mediates the effect of migration status. This suggests large differences between ethnic communities and shows the need for further studies on this topic.

Fourth, we highlighted an association between relevance of friendship and educational ambitions. Looking at the relevance of schoolmates, we found that if immigrants' children think that schoolmates are important, they tend to have higher educational ambitions.

Moreover, if on the one hand having Italian friends is associated with higher long-term aspirations, on the other hand having more non-native friends is associated (though not significantly) with a lowering of educational ambitions. Also, the relevance of friends may be seen as an indicator of integration. If a child thinks that friends are important, we can suppose he or she shares time with friends, and this could be a determinant in terms of integration. In this case, our results confirm for Italy evidence from previous international literature:

Personal friendship networks are a determinant of educational ambitions.

In the last part of the study, we investigated whether the scholastic context contributes to the educational ambitions of immigrants' children. We calculated the percentage of Italian students with high educational ambitions for each school, and we looked at the association between this percentage and the individual ambitions of immigrants' children. Our results show that an immigrant child attending a lower secondary school where one-third of the Italians have high short-term educational expectations is more likely to have high short-term educational expectations. If we look at long-term aspirations, the change happens when more than two-thirds of Italians have high aspirations. Being part of a challenging context is, hence, clearly relevant for children of immigrants. This is perhaps our most relevant result, and it is in some ways another validation of the relevance of social capital and the influence of peers in shaping educational ambitions.

The analyses presented in this paper have mainly a descriptive aim, since we estimate statistical associations without a specific causal interpretation. Nevertheless, the effort represents one of the first attempts to study the educational expectation of the children of immigrants in Italy. Also, to our knowledge, this is one of the first descriptions of the educational expectations of immigrants' children at a national level. Moreover, the results provide some evidence that the educational ambitions of immigrants' children living in Italy and attending the eighth grade are associated with social capital and school context, which have been found in recent international literature to be relevant in influencing the educational expectations of children (Portes et al. 2010).

We can, therefore, conclude our paper with a general remark on the policy implications of our study. First, in order to enhance educational (and, consequently, occupational) outcomes of the children of immigrants, it may be important to enhance children's ambitions and to enable children to think about their future in the same way natives do. Second, considering the relevance of the context is important when studying educational attitudes. Segregation in schools with no interaction between natives and immigrants may have a considerable negative effect on immigrants' children. It may be useful, instead, to propose extra-scholastic activities (sports, for example) that encourage children to socialize. Starting from these results, it could be interesting to develop policies concerning the integration of immigrant children, not only to improve their scholastic output but also to empower their involvement in social activities that facilitate the creation of strong ties between children of immigrants and children of Italians.

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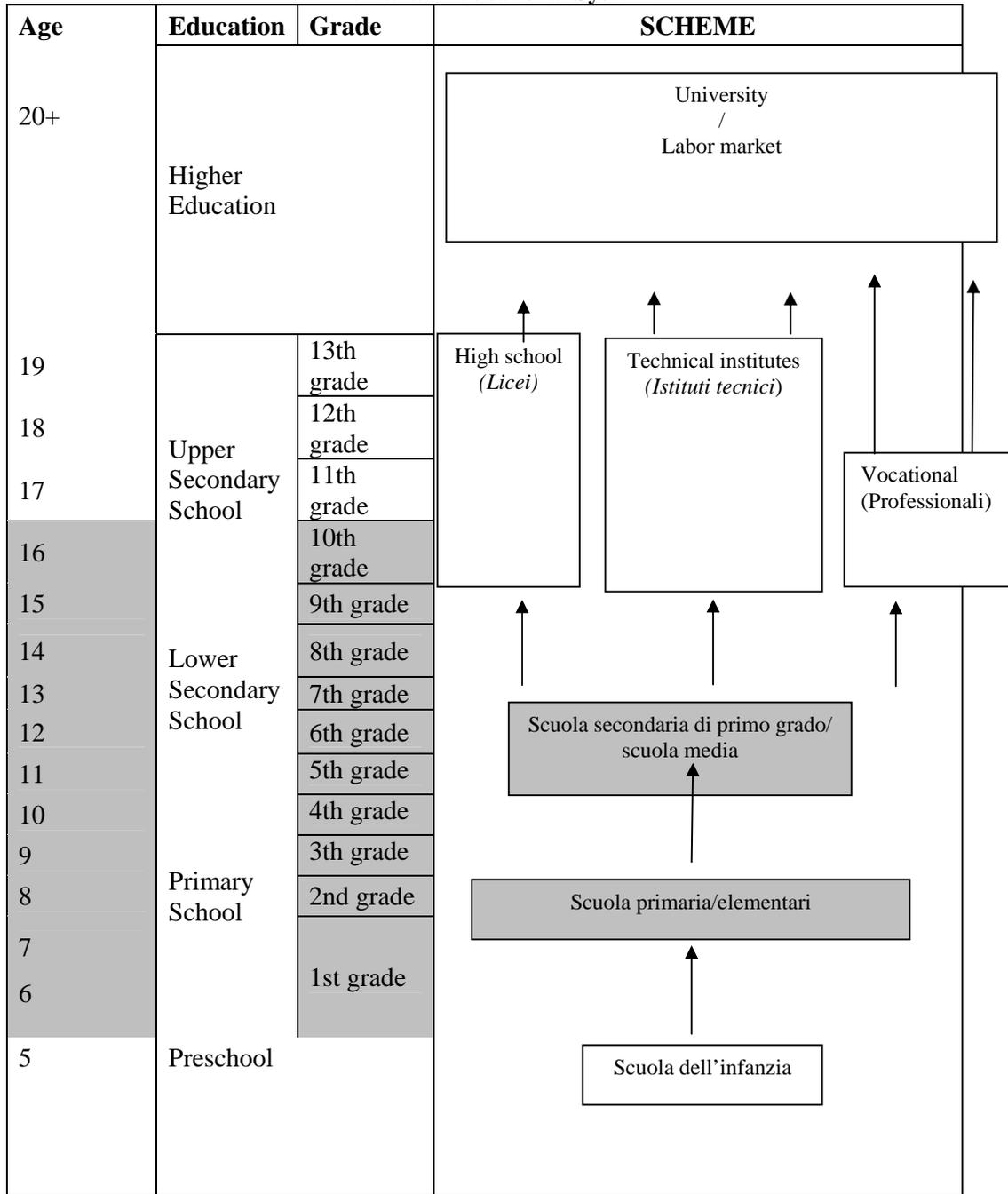
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Notes

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- ¹ Students who pursue vocational tracks complete in three years.
² Detailed results are available from authors on request.

FIGURE 1
The Italian Educational System



Note: Grey area indicates that this level is compulsory

TABLE 1
Percentage of Students with Non-Italian Citizenship by School Level (1996-97 and 2001-02 through 2008-09)

School Year	Total	Preschool	Primary School	Secondary	
				Lower Secondary School	Upper Secondary School
1996-1997	0.7	0.8	1.0	0.6	0.3
...					
2001-2002	2.2	2.5	3.0	2.5	1.1
2002-2003	2.7	3.0	3.7	3.1	1.3
2003-2004	3.5	3.6	4.5	4.0	2.0
2004-2005	4.2	4.5	5.3	4.7	2.4
2005-2006	4.8	5.0	5.9	5.6	3.1
2006-2007	5.6	5.7	6.8	6.5	3.8
2007-2008	6.4	6.7	7.7	7.3	4.3
2008-2009*	7.0	7.6	8.3	8.0	4.8

Source: Official statistics, Ministry of Education (MIUR), 2008

Note: * estimate

TABLE 2
Upper Secondary School and University Expectations by Generational Status
(in percentages)

	<i>Licei</i> Expectations	University Expectations	N
Natives	47.7	48.5	2,296
Second generation	43.9	48.1	645
Immigrants			
Arrived ages 0-4	27.9	39.0	282
Arrived ages 5-9	25.5	32.5	560
Arrived ages 10-13	22.6	38.9	1,119

Source: Italian Second Generation Survey (ITAGEN2)

TABLE 3
Logistic Regression of Educational Expectations: Odds Ratios

	Which school will you choose after lower secondary school? (Ref = Low expectations)	Do you think you will go to university? (Ref = Low expectations)
Migration status (Ref = Natives)		
Second generation	0.90	0.99
Preschool immigrants	0.57***	0.94
Childhood immigrants	0.49***	0.72**
Adolescent immigrants	0.45***	1.03
Female	3.44***	1.93***
Zone of residence (Ref = North)		
Center	1.19*	1.08
South	1.85***	1.67***
Socioeconomic status	1.04***	1.03***
Parents' education level (Ref = High)		
Medium	0.55***	0.48***
Low	0.32***	0.26***
Unknown	0.37***	0.22***
Number of siblings (Ref =0)		
1	0.87	0.83
2	0.83	0.66***
3	0.77	0.68**
More than 3	0.56**	0.60**
Mixed couple	1.01	1.13
N	5,072	5,072
Pseudo R-square	0.16	0.12

Source: Italian Second Generation Survey (ITAGEN2)

Notes: Analyses are weighted and presented as odds ratios.

***<0.01 **<0.05 *<0.1

TABLE 4
Upper Secondary School and University Expectations by Country of Origin
(percentages)

	<i>Licei</i> Expectations	University Expectations	N
Developed countries	51.4	59.8	54
Philippines	40.4	43.6	89
Other African countries	39.6	46.9	193
Romania	33.9	45.0	185
South America	31.9	54.6	196
Other Asian countries	29.2	39.4	146
Tunisia	26.5	46.6	70
Albania	24.3	37.4	352
Eastern Europe and Balkans	23.8	37.6	187
India	17.7	25.3	115
China	17.2	22.0	235
Macedonia	14.6	19.6	105
Morocco	13.7	25.0	195
Natives	47.5	48.5	

Source: Italian Second Generation Survey (ITAGEN2)

TABLE 5
Logistic Regression of *Licei* and University Expectations: Odds Ratios

	<i>Licei</i> Expectations	University Expectations
Migration status (Ref = Natives)		
Second generation	1.28	0.97
Preschool migrants	0.88	0.98
Childhood migrants	0.73	0.73
Adolescent migrants	0.60	0.99
Female	3.44***	1.93***
Zone of residence (Ref = North)		
Center	1.19*	1.09
South	1.85***	1.68***
Socioeconomic status	1.04***	1.03***
Parents' education level (Ref =High)		
Medium	0.57***	0.49***
Low	0.33***	0.27***
Unknown	0.38***	0.23***
Number of siblings (Ref = 0)		
1	0.88	0.83
2	0.83	0.66***
3	0.78	0.68**
More than 3	0.57***	0.60**
Mixed couple	0.76	1.15
Country of origin (Ref =Natives)		
Developed countries	1.38	1.74
Philippines	1.01	1.09
Other African countries	1.11	1.54
Romania	0.99	1.09
South America	0.95	2.07**
Other Asian countries	1.19	1.54
Tunisia	0.61	1.61
Albania	0.64	1.02
Eastern Europe and Balkans	0.63	0.85
India	0.47**	0.52
China	0.42***	0.54*
Morocco	0.28***	0.70
Macedonia	0.47	0.60
N	5,072	5,072
Pseudo R-square	0.16	0.12

Source: Italian Second Generation Survey (ITAGEN2)

Notes: Analyses are weighted and presented as odds ratios.***<0.01 **<0.05 *<0.1

FIGURE 2
Immigrant High School Expectations Relative to Natives: Unstandardized and Standardized Odds Ratios

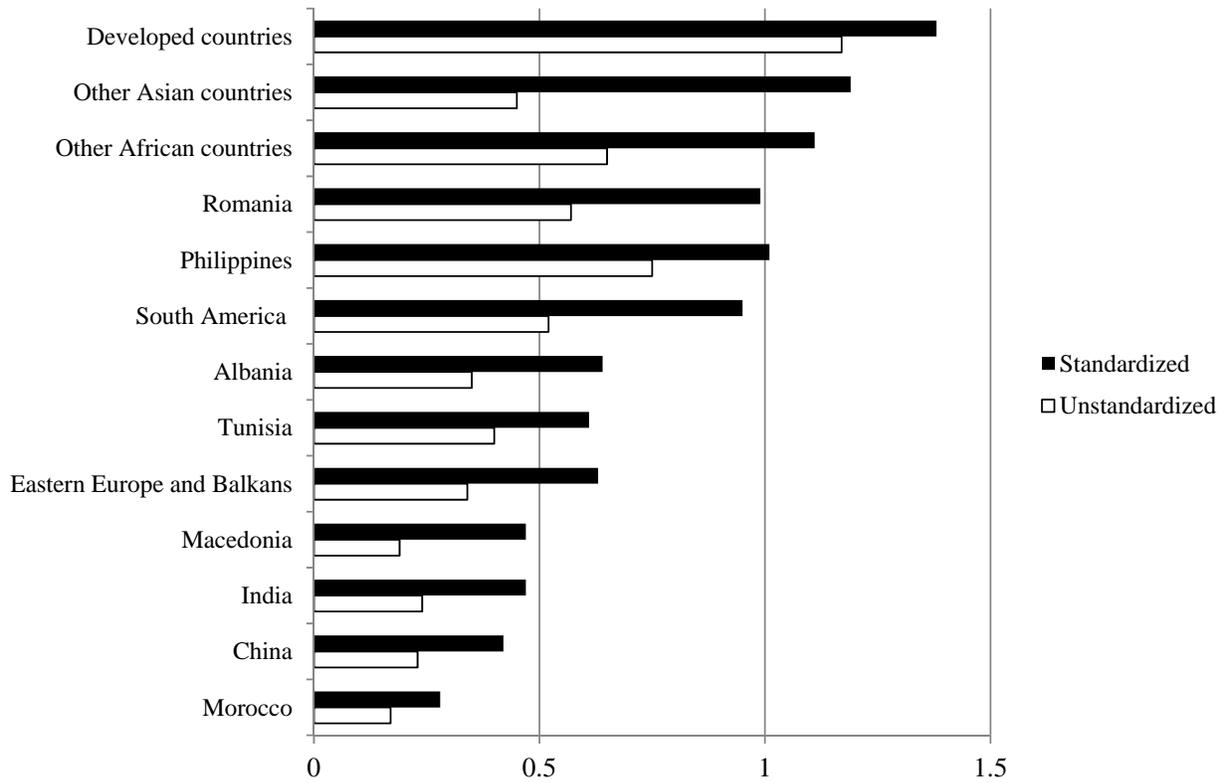


FIGURE 3
Immigrant University Expectations Relative to Natives: Unstandardized and Standardized Odds Ratios

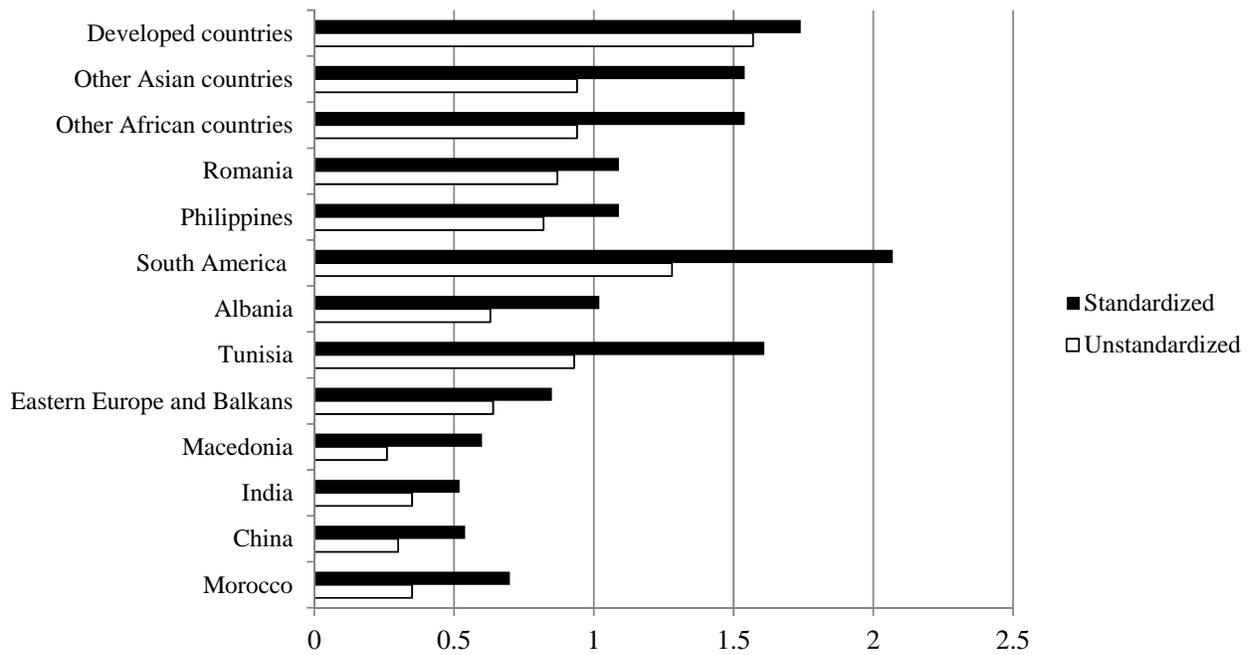


TABLE 6
Effects of Friendship Ties on *Licei* and University Expectations for Children of Immigrants

	<i>Licei</i> Expectations	University Expectations
Classmates are really important	1.13***	1.20***
Having Italian friends	1.72**	2.04***
Having immigrant friends	0.80	1.23
Having more Italian friends	1.17	1.28**
Having more immigrant friends	0.83	0.90
Meeting Italian friends out of school often	0.97	1.00
Meeting immigrant friends out of school often	0.89**	0.99

Source: Italian Second Generation Survey (ITAGEN2)

Notes: Models control for sex, migration status, socioeconomic status, education level of parents, zone of residence, and number of siblings. Analyses are weighted and presented as odds ratios.

***<0.01 **<0.05 *<0.1

TABLE 7
Multilevel Logit Regression of *Licei* and University Expectations: Odds Ratios

	<i>Licei</i> Expectations			University Expectations		
	Model 1 (null)	Model 2 (Level I variables)	Model 3 (Level II variables)	Model 1 (null)	Model 2 (Level I variables)	Model 3 (Level II variables)
Migration status (Ref = Second generation)						
Preschool immigrants		0.77***	0.77***	Preschool immigrants	0.92	0.93
Childhood immigrants		0.83***	0.83***	Childhood immigrants	0.85***	0.85***
Adolescent immigrants		0.84***	0.84***	Adolescent immigrants	0.97	0.97
Female		2.38***	2.38***	Female	1.78***	1.77***
Parents' education level (Ref =High)				Parents' education level (Ref =High)		
Medium		0.89***	0.89***	Medium	0.81***	0.81***
Low		0.45***	0.45***	Low	0.33***	0.33***
Unknown		0.85***	0.85***	Unknown	0.80***	0.80***
Socioeconomic status		1.02***	1.02***	Socioeconomic status	1.02***	1.02***
Number of siblings (Ref = 0)				Number of siblings (Ref = 0)		
1		0.87*	0.87*	1	0.87*	0.88*
2		0.86**	0.87**	2	0.88**	0.88**
3		0.85***	0.85***	3	0.89**	0.89**
More than 3		0.84***	0.84***	More than 3	0.86***	0.86***
Mixed couple		1.06	1.07	Mixed couple	1.19	1.21
% Italians with high expectations (Ref = < 33%)				% Italians with high expectations (Ref = < 33%)		
33-66			1.34**	33-66		0.82
More than 66			2.07***	More than 66		1.23*
Level II variance	0.204 (.065)	0.207 (.076)	.154 (.066)	Level II variance	0.181 (0.054)	0.172 (.058)
Number of observations	2,557	2,275	2,275	Number of observations	2,557	2,275
Number of groups	166	166	166	Number of groups	166	166
LR test	23.08***	15.88***	9.92***	LR test	28.40***	23.17***

Source: Italian Second Generation Survey (ITAGEN2)

Notes: Analyses are weighted and presented as odds ratios. Significance: ***<0.01 **<0.05 *<0.1

